

New Comp Plan in Place

The City Council and County Board both unanimously approved the new Comprehensive Plan and Long Range Transportation Plan last month. The document provides guidelines for community growth through the year 2030 and includes plans for road improvements, utilities and other facilities needed to serve future residents and businesses. The federal government requires local governments to update their transportation plans every five years in order to remain eligible for grant funds. Some new features of the plan include:

- More new locations for commercial development, with new categories and clearer descriptions of the composition of land uses and character of development in those categories.
- More emphasis on opening up land along I-80 for employers with extensive land needs.
- Planning for six lanes along Highway 2 south and east of 56th Street/Old Cheney to 84th Street, O Street from 48th Street to downtown, and Cornhusker Boulevard.
- Updated Comprehensive Plans for Bennet and Hickman.

The adopted plan is available for review on the department's web page at lincoln.ne.gov (keyword: complan), and you can also purchase printed copies in the Planning Department at 555 South 10th Street.



Lafayette ♥ *Lincoln*

A 15-member team of planning commissioners, private sector leaders and staff from this Louisiana coastal city arrived in Lincoln last month for an intense series of workshops and tour of our community, coordinated by our department. They have observed Lincoln and its mechanisms for growth management over the years and wanted to see and hear about it in person. A number of private sector leaders as well as staff from several departments participated in these sessions, sharing our frustrations as well as our successes. We found many similarities and many differences in the types of planning/development issues the two communities face and how we respond to them. And we were pleased to have our colleagues leave a nice chunk of change with our local businesses.

MORE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

The City Council on December 4 voted to change the regulations controlling Electronic Changeable Copy (ECC) signs. Under the previous City sign ordinance, businesses were allowed to have “on-premises” ECC signs of up to 80 square feet in size. Animation was allowed except for a prohibition on flashing and blinking outside the downtown zoning district. Although the ECC provisions apparently were intended for public messages rather than commercial displays, the language was ambiguous, and signs have been used for both purposes. These signs have become more common as LED technology has become more advanced and affordable. City residents have complained that some of these signs are too distracting due to extreme brightness and animation techniques.

“Off-premises” signs (billboards) were not allowed to use digital or other electronic technology to show changing messages. The owner of most of the local billboards in Lincoln came to Planning with a request to amend the ordinance to allow for the limited use of digital technology on billboards. Staff decided this would be a good time to consider standards for brightness and animation for on-site as well as off-site ECC signs. We drafted proposed new standards after consulting with key stakeholders, and brought these proposals to the Planning Commission and City Council for public hearings.

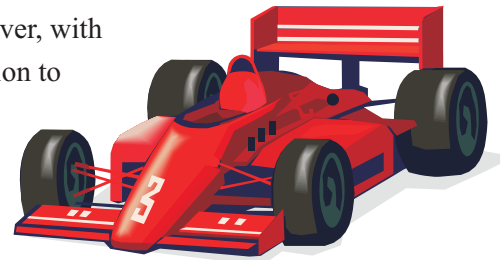
The Council approval means that:

- Billboards are now allowed to use digital technology to display changeable messages, but the messages must be static and hold for at least 10 seconds. The new technology can be applied to most billboards, whether or not they conform to other sign code standards, as long as they are not within 150 feet of and facing a residential district, park or cemetery. Signs using this technology must be spaced at least 5,000 feet from each other, and for every one of these new faces applied to an existing billboard, three nonconforming billboard faces must be removed or the “banked” rights to install three new faces eliminated.
- On-premises signs of up to 80 square feet may display changeable commercial messages, but the messages must be static and hold for at least one second.
- Both types of signs may have animated transitions between the messages, but the duration of that transition cannot be more than one second, and the animation is limited to specified modes.

Last, the Council approved an amendment that basically legalizes any signs that were permitted by the City even if they did not necessarily meet all the previous provisions. This includes the Anderson Ford sign on I-80 at North 27th Street. These signs must conform to the new brightness standards of the ordinance.

RACE TRACK HITS SPEEDBUMP

Earlier this fall, the Planning Commission held one of its longest hearings ever, with several hundred people in attendance and dozens testifying on an application to operate a dragstrip on land flanking the east side of Highway 77, several miles north of I80 near Davey. The Commission voted narrowly to recommend denial of the request. The application has not yet been scheduled for hearing by the County Board. On December 14, the Board discussed the possibility of appointing a new Motorsports Task Force to take a comprehensive look at the potential venues, locations, costs and benefits for local motorsports recreation and entertainment activities. They will continue that discussion over the next few weeks.





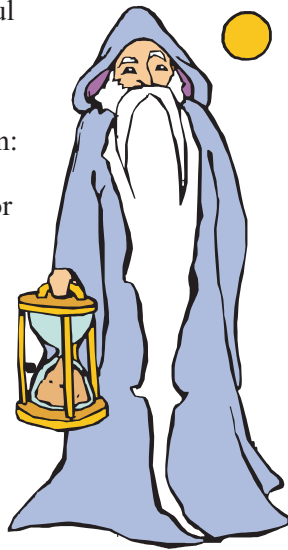
Light Show

A citizen committee has been meeting with the Planning Department's consultants from Olsson Associates for more than a year to review the City's outdoor lighting standards. They have conducted field observations, evaluated standards from the industry and other communities, and reviewed possible revisions to the current standards. The department has released a draft report for review by the Planning Commission at a workshop at 11:30 a.m. on Wednesday, December 20, before its regular meeting in Room 113 of the County-City Building.

FOR AULD LANG SYNE

This past year has been very eventful for the Planning Department. In addition to completing the Comprehensive Plan update and dealing with sign issues, Planning was involved in:

- Coordinating annexation agreements and related development approvals for properties totaling 3.5 square miles
- Staffing the Mayor's Event Facility Task Force
- Assisting in the installation of downtown bike lanes
- Staffing the joint Health Board/Planning Commission committee review of development issues involving walkability, pipelines, and hazardous materials use/storage



- Assisting LPS with the development and implementation of its bond program
- Completing historic surveys for Eastridge, Country Club, and Antelope Creek neighborhoods
- Staffing the Planning Commission's downzoning committee
- Amending the zoning code to provide more relief to nonstandard and nonconforming uses
- Working with Woods Park, Witherbee, 40th/A, and Everett neighborhoods on their downzoning applications
- Amending zoning rules to allow for administrative approvals of requests to waive design standards, update landscaping and screening standards, reduce front yard setbacks in commercial/industrial districts, more flexible outdoor dining rules and reduce parking

It's been more than four years now that I have had the (mostly) pleasure of serving this community and communicating with you through this newsletter. The planning department's job is to provide good information and advice on development issues to the Mayor, the various boards that we serve and staff, our customers in the real estate industry, and the general public. We know that sometimes the information and advice will not be warmly welcomed, let alone heeded. But we hope that on the whole, it is helpful in making more informed decisions about how this community should grow and prosper. Your continuing feedback is valuable to us, so if you have some for us, now or anytime, please complete the Customer Service Evaluation Form on our web page at lincoln.ne.gov (keyword: plan).



*Best wishes for a **happy and safe holiday season** from your **City-County Planning Department**.*



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